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Drawing Pictures in Words: The Anecdote as Spatial Form in Biographies of Hogarth

Karen Junod

In this essay I explore the role played by certain anecdotes in the biographies of William Hogarth published in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain. After briefly outlining the semantic evolution of the term, I discuss the spatial and visual qualities of this narrative form. By means of several examples, I show how such brief and striking stories can be considered as the closest narrative equivalent to Hogarth's pictures. In my conclusion, I place my essay in the larger context of writing on art produced in England at the time, and show how Hogarthian anecdotes had an impact on the reception of this artist in the nineteenth century.

> When *Leonardo da Vinci* lay upon his death-bed, *Francis* the First, actuated by that instinctive reverence which great minds invariably feel for each other, visited him in his chamber. An attendant informing the painter that the king was come to inquire after his health, he raised himself from the pillow, a lambent gleam of gratitude for the honour lighted up his eyes, and he made an effort to speak. The exertion was too much; he fell back; and *Francis* stooping to support him, this great artist expired in his arms. Affected with the awful catastrophe, the king heaved a sigh of sympathetic sorrow, and left the bedchamber in tears. He was immediately surrounded by a crowd of those kind-hearted nobles, who delight in soothing the sorrows of a sovereign; and one of them entreating him not to indulge his grief, added, as a consolatory reflection, "Consider, sire, this man was but a painter!" "I do," replied the monarch, "and I at the same time consider, that though, as a king I could make a thousand such as you, – the Deity alone can make such a painter as *Leonardo da Vinci.*" (Ireland, *Hogarth Illustrated*, i-ii)

It is with the well-known scene of Leonardo da Vinci's dying in the arms of Francis I that John Ireland introduced his biography of William Hogarth, a work first published in 1791 and entitled *Hogarth Illustrated.* Odd as such an opening story may have appeared to contemporary

readers of artistic Lives – the majority of biographies of artists tended at this time to focus immediately on the artist himself or his ancestors – it was for Ireland a most appropriate way of describing the character and praising the talents of the English painter. "Shall I be permitted to adopt this remark," he continued politely,

> and without any diminution of the Italian's well-earned fame, assert that the eulogy is equally appropriate to the Englishman, whose name is at the head of this chapter; for he was not the follower, but the leader of a class, and became a painter from divine impulse, rather than human instruction. [...] [H]e was the pupil, – the disciple,– the worshipper of Nature! (Ireland ii-iii)

Ireland's laudatory account of Hogarth as a child of Nature echoed the appraisal which Horace Walpole had given the artist more than a decade earlier in the fourth volume of his *Anecdotes of Painting in England* (1780). For Walpole, Hogarth, too, "drew all his stores from nature and the force of his own genius, and was indebted neither to models nor books for his style, thoughts or hints, [...] he never succeeded when he designed for the works of other men" (Walpole iv, 71). In contrast to Ireland, however, who underlined the artist's lack of intellectual sophistication, Walpole constantly emphasized Hogarth's affinities and kinship with contemporary authors, describing him "as a writer of comedy with a pencil [rather] than as a painter" and associating him with literary figures such as Molière and Samuel Butler (Walpole iv, 68).

Walpole's and Ireland's assessment of Hogarth have polyphonically reverberated in later (including contemporary) accounts of the artist's life and work. Since the publication of their texts, an embarrassment of biographical and critical studies have explored in many different ways the naturalistic and the literary dimension of Hogarth's art. Not surprisingly, most studies have focused on the artist's numerous prints, a visual repository of eighteenth-century English life and manners. Others, on the other hand, have discussed Hogarth's aesthetic treatise, the *Analysis of Beauty* (1752), which the artist wrote from his opposition to certain aspects of neo-classicism. My aim in this essay is to approach Hogarth's aesthetics from a different angle. In order to explore the naturalistic and literary dimension of his work, I would like to concentrate on this very specific type of narrative form – the anecdote. In truth, to relate the anecdote to Hogarth's art has become almost commonplace. Numerous scholars from the eighteenth century onwards

have underlined the "anecdotal"[1] dimension of Hogarth's art and have discussed the narrative quality of his pictures, not least of his modern moral subjects such as the *Harlot's Progress* (1732), the *Rake's Progress* (1733-1735), or *Marriage-à-la-Mode* (1743-1745) (e.g. Sitwell and Wark). My purpose here, however, is different in that I do not wish to discuss the *literary* quality of Hogarth's naturalistic pictures, but, conversely, to examine the *spatial* and *pictorial* qualities of certain anecdotes to be found in a number of biographical texts devoted to the English artist.

Analyses of spatial forms in literature, such as this one, have become more and more frequent in recent critical literature. Most of them have largely been indebted to the writings of Joseph Frank and W.J.T. Mitchell, two scholars who have made significant contributions to our understanding of the function and nature of certain textual patterns that suspend or dislocate chronological narratives. Both (along with many others) have examined these specific instances in literature where the (con)sequential, diachronic flow of language is interrupted by synchronic pauses, be they descriptions, characterizations, *ekphrases*, or literary "images." Whilst Frank has maintained since the publication of his seminal study in 1945 that spatial form is characteristic of modernist literature, Mitchell, revising and expanding Frank's idea of spatiality, has demonstrated that the study of spatial form should not be restricted to any particular period. Indeed, by showing that time and space are not antithetical dimensions – that is, that temporality in language almost inevitably contains spatial images and, conversely, that spatial forms do not automatically exclude temporality – Mitchell has argued that spatial forms are "a crucial aspect of the experience and interpretation of literature in *all* ages and cultures" (273, my emphasis). Since its publication, then, Mitchell's essay has generated a whole body of literature exploring the spatiality of texts of various genres and periods, including the eighteenth century where the works of Sterne, Smollett, Richardson and Boswell have received particular attention (Cantrell; Redford 53-80). It is in the light of these studies that I wish to approach the work of Hogarth. Before discussing in greater detail the spatiality of certain anecdotes in the biographies of the English artist, however, a cursory view of the evolution of the word will help us to understand the nature of Hogarth's art as well his artistic status in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

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[1] Here the term "anecdotal" is not used as synonymous with "untrustworthy" or "unreliable" but has to be understood as "relating a story or an incident."

Derived from the Greek "an-ekdota" (from "ekdidonai": to publish, to edit, "an-ekdota" meaning thus "unpublished," "not revealed," and, by extension, "secret"), the term was initially synonymous with "secret histories" and hence referred to the scandalous details of the private lives of eminent persons at court – an unofficial history taking place behind closed doors and seen through the keyhole. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the word gradually lost its scandalous dimension, and came to be understood more generally as any striking and interesting "biographical incident; a minute passage of private life" (Johnson). The interest for anecdotes at that time was testified by the increasing number of works announced and published as *Anecdotes*; that is, of works which were not composed of such brief stories interspersed *within* a published text, but which consisted of nothing *but* anecdotes. Like their sister genre "ana" (when used as a suffix), works such as Joseph Spence's *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men. Collected from Conversation* (recorded during Spence's lifetime but not published until 1820) were not framed within a narrative context but corresponded to fragments of actual conversations published during or after the death of a man (only rarely of a woman), of learning and wit (Maber; Schäfer; Schöwerling). As this genre became more popular, its semantic scope evolved. By the second half of the eighteenth century, the term no longer referred only to brief and witty sayings of and about individuals but increasingly came to be understood – like Hogarth's biographies – as the compilation of miscellaneous material presented in a polite, worldly, yet often playful and humorous manner. Despite their popularity, however, biographical and historical *Anecdotes* were still considered an inferior literary genre. From their very origin, *Anecdotes* always resided in the shadow of their two more prestigious companions, the *History* and the *Life*. One example testifying to their lower position on the literary hierarchy in the second half of the eighteenth century is Horace Walpole's preface to his *Anecdotes of Painting* (1762). There, the author characteristically apologizes for the inferior state of the arts in his country and writes that because Britain has "produced so few good artists," he will entitle his history "*Anecdotes of Painting in England*" rather than "*The Lives of English Painters*" (Walpole i, vi).[2]

Besides its importance to British art historiography, Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting* was significant because it inaugurated a series of other,

[2] The biographical model to which Walpole was referring here was Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550 and 1568).

similarly-entitled biographical texts devoted to Hogarth. Until the early nineteenth century, the majority of texts relating to the artist – be they multi-volume works or short articles in newspapers or magazines – were called *Anecdotes* or *Biographical Anecdotes*. John Nichols, for instance, who with his three subsequent editions of Hogarth contributed to the spread of the artist's reputation in England as well as Germany, always included *Biographical Anecdotes* in his title.[3] Besides Walpole and Nichols, other writers were seized with what Edmond Malone described as "Hogarthomania" (Letter to Lord Charlemont). John Ireland named the third volume of his *Hogarth Illustrated,* "Hogarth's Anecdotes of his Own Life and Other Original Material" (1798) as did Thomas Cook, who published his own *Anecdotes of William Hogarth, with an Explanatory Description of his Works* in 1813. Finally, John Bowyer Nichols (John Nichols's son) printed a collective work entitled *Anecdotes of William Hogarth Written by Himself, with Essays on his Life and Genius* (1833) which reassembled autobiographical information as well as the most important critical articles on the artist, including those by Horace Walpole, Allan Cunningham, William Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb – to name but a few.

As we can see, biographers and publishers exploited the popularity of *Anecdotes* when designing their works on Hogarth. Personal stories about one of the most contentious figures on the scene of English art were bound to attract the attention and whet the curiosity of an increasing number of readers of art. Concurrently, the genre also threw light on the artist's status: because Hogarth's pictures were, regardless of their popular recognition, considered as anti-academic and anti-Reynoldsian, a literary genre like the *Anecdotes* was quite appropriate for describing the alleged "lower-mindedness" and yet attractiveness of his prints and paintings.

From an eighteenth-century art biographical perspective, most of the *Anecdotes* devoted to the life and work of Hogarth are rather conventional. They start with the artist's ancestors and parents, mention his birth, continue with his artistic formation and his apprenticeship with the engraver Ellis Gamble, name his commissioners, relate the artist's growing success, the sale of his prints, his artistic triumph, and his po-

[3] His first edition of 1781, entitled *Biographical Anecdotes of William Hogarth; and a Catalogue of His Works Chronologically Arranged; with Occasional Remarks*, was translated into German by L. A. Crayen and published in Leipzig in 1783.

litical and artistic quarrels.[4] These texts, not surprisingly, also mention, but do not necessarily end with Hogarth's death on 26 October 1764. This broad, developing, and forward-moving biographical structure is, however, often interrupted and suspended by the inclusion of letters, verses, or passages from the *Analysis of Beauty*, by long footnotes, biographical anecdotes, and descriptions of his art works. These descriptions usually refer to graphic prints inserted within the text. The distinction between visual descriptions and anecdotes is, in the present context, an important one. As I shall demonstrate below, both concern the reading of a picture, but whereas the former *point* or *refer to* certain elements in the prints, the latter *render* and *recreate* verbally the world of Hogarth's visual art. To quote from Frederic Burwick in relation to Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's *Ausführliche Erklärung der Hogarthischen Kupferstiche* (1794-1799), the anecdote is simultaneously "poetic" and "prosaic" – two contrasting methods of literary transcription that Burwick distinguishes in the following manner:

> The prosaic method is no more than an *Auslegen*, the pedantic chore of identifying and listing the objects and details that contribute to Hogarth's story-telling exposition; the poetic method is a hermeneutic engagement and recreation, in which cultural context, satirical tone, as well as attentive response to narrative details are re-represented in an artistic whole. In choosing the poetic method, Lichtenberg pledged himself to unify explication and interpretation. (168)

The Hogarthian anecdote thus combines the pictorial and spatial qualities of a description *and* the liveliness of a poetic rendering. Indeed, like an *exemplum*, a *testimonium*, or an apothegm, the anecdote represents a brief, quasi-independent, and relocatable narrative unit within a text. Framed within the linear and chronological progression of (in this case) the biographical narrative, the anecdote represents by contrast a literary and textual space in which time has been momentarily suspended – or more precisely, decelerated – in order to focus on one specific moment. This quasi-suspension of time, the abundance of details and the frequent use of the deictic mode, are all elements that characterize the anecdote, rendering it a highly pictorial narrative form. The reader does not simply *read* the anecdote but, constructing a mental picture of the scene described, (s)he can actually *visualize* or *picture* it. A passage taken

[4] These included his battle for the establishment of a copyright law and his disagreement on the foundation of an official, Royal academy of art.

from the third edition of John Nichols's *Biographical Anecdotes of William Hogarth* (1785) will serve as an example. Nichols, to illustrate Hogarth's absent-mindedness, writes:

> Soon after he set up his carriage, he had occasion to pay a visit to the lord-mayor (I believe it was Mr. *Beckford*). When he went, the weather was fine; but business detained him till a violent shower of rain came on. He was let out of the Mansion-house by a different door from that at which he entered; and, seeing the rain, began immediately to call for a hackney-coach. Not one was to be met with on any of the neighbouring stands; and our artist sallied forth to brave the storm, and actually reached *Leicester-fields* without bestowing a thought on his own carriage, till Mrs. *Hogarth* (surprized to see him so wet and splashed) asked where he had left it. (58-59)

After broad, and thus visually less distinct, information about the artist's career, private life, or character – and the use of such statements as "[i]n 1730, Mr. *Hogarth* married the only daughter of Sir James Thornhill, by whom he had no child" (Nichols 25-26) or "[the artist] affected to despise every kind of knowledge which he did not possess" (55) – such a passage strikes the reader with its visual sharpness. Readers are able to witness and reproduce the event in their mind's eye. The comparatively highly visual, and hence more naturalistic, quality of this passage is created not only by the detailed account of the weather conditions – from "fine" to "violent shower" to "storm" – but also by elements such as "a different door," "the hackney-coach," "the neighbouring stand" or by the naming of specific location such as "*Leicester-fields.*" Thanks to the presence of such indices, the biographer is able to condense a whole afternoon in several lines without losing the clarity of the scene. What makes this passage particularly significant is that it echoes certain episodes from contemporary literature. In this particular case, it is reminiscent of Henry Fielding in whose novels confusion also arises due to doors being opened in the wrong place, at the wrong time and by the wrong people (see for instance Book IV, chapter 14 of *Joseph Andrews*, 1742). Another example taken from the same edition of Nichols's work will further illustrate the specific function of the anecdote in the biographies of Hogarth. Very much in the same Fieldingesque vein as the first excerpt, we learn that

> During his apprenticeship, [Hogarth] set out one *Sunday*, with two or three companions, on an excursion to *Highgate*. The weather being hot, they went into a public-house, where they had not been long, before a quarrel arose

> between some persons in the same room. One of the disputants struck the other on the head with a quart pot, and cut him very much. The blood running down the man's face, together with the agony of the wound, which had distorted his features into a most hideous grin, presented *Hogarth*, who shewed himself thus early "apprised of the mode Nature had intended he should pursue," with too laughable a subject to be overlooked. He drew out his pencil, and produced on the spot one of the most ludicrous figures that ever was seen. What rendered this piece the more valuable was, that it exhibited an exact likeness of the man, with the portrait of his antagonist, and the figures in caricature of the principal persons gathered round him. This anecdote was furnished by one of his fellow apprentices then present, a person of indisputable character, and who continued his intimacy with *Hogarth* long after they both grew up into manhood. (Nichols 7)

This extract, again, shows very well the features of the anecdote mentioned above: its gradual focus on a specific event – from an outdoor "excursion to Highgate," to "a public house" to "the same room" – as well as the use of the deictic mode ("the" and the personal pronoun "his"). Moreover, whilst certain verbal indices create a sense of movement – "went," "struck," "drew out his pencil" – others, such as the use of gerundive in "running down", or in expressions such as "together with" or "on the spot," give instead the impression of atemporality, spatiality or simultaneity. As Pamela Cantrell has remarked in her pictorial analysis of Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, "[i]t is not that the action unfolds in one moment, of course, but rather that its successive dimension is compressed into a mood of simultaneity" (Cantrell 75). Here, as above, the anecdote does indeed contain a sequence of different narrative actions – the characters' walk, the quarrel, and Hogarth's execution of the sketch – but all these events are condensed in one single picture. In Jerry C. Beasly's own terms, then, the anecdote – like a Hogarthian print – represents a "dynamic stasis," that is, an arrested moment which nevertheless includes some temporal dimension (quoted in Cantrell 74). In the textual framework, and by contrast to other larger-scale, time-sweeping, and less sharply-defined passages, such a self-contained unit is visually much more effective. It represents a very close, if not the closest, verbal equivalent to a Hogarthian picture.

This second anecdote sheds light simultaneously on Hogarth's life and his art, as well as on his practice as a painter. Unlike the first anecdote, this second story focuses on a dramatic incident witnessed – *and spontaneously sketched* – by Hogarth: the artist is at once observer and

draughtsman. Hence, the anecdote acquires a double function: not only does it depict the episode but it also, indirectly, describes the sketch made by Hogarth. To refer to the distinction made by James Heffernan in his *Museum of Words*, one can say that the anecdote is simultaneously *pictorial* and *ekphrastic*: it describes at once a natural event as well as a work of representational art (Heffernan 3). In other words, the storyteller does not just make us see the scene vividly *as in a picture*, but he also makes us see it *as a picture*. Its subject matter, of course, is typical of Hogarth: it is an incident rooted in everyday life, inspired by Nature, and which, also typically for a Hogarthian scene, provides different characters and caricatures (we learn that Hogarth produced "an *exact likeness* of the man, the *portrait* of his antagonist, and the figures *in caricatures* of the principal persons gathered around him"). This anecdote thus represents not only an amusing relief within the flow of the biographical narrative; it also sheds light on the very artistic method used by Hogarth. It can be read as an aesthetic "statement" in that it clearly places the artist in a realistic tradition. It was by observing Nature and the world around him, and not by copying the art of the old masters, that Hogarth distinguished himself from previous artists. Hence, through the anecdote – *and because of the very narrative features of the anecdote* – we not only "see" how Hogarth performed his art but, simultaneously, we also "see" the *result* of the performance. In fact, the very location of this brief episode within the body of the text underpins its aesthetic significance: like a Hogarthian print, in which frames play an important role, the incident is here also framed between significant passages. It is precisely when Hogarth abandons his apprenticeship, stops copying already-existing images, and feels the "impulse of genius" (Nichols 7) that the anecdote is introduced.

Apart from the excursion to Highgate, numerous other anecdotes punctuate the texts devoted to Hogarth's life and work. Whilst not all of them are as detailed, and hence as pictorial, as those quoted above, most of them throw light on a specific aspect of Hogarth's art and method. For instance, the episode recording a theatrical impromptu – "a laughable parody on the scene of *Julius Caesar*, where the *Ghost* appears to *Brutus*" (Nichols 57) – performed by Dr. Hoadly, the actor David Garrick, and Hogarth at Dr Hoadly's house underlines the dramatic and

satiric quality of some of the artist's pictures.[5] In this particular case, we learn that

> *Hogarth* personated the spectre; but so unretentive was his memory, that, although his speech consisted only of two lines, he was unable to get them by heart. At last they hit on the following expedient in his favour. The verses he was to deliver were written in such large letters, on the outside of an illuminated paper-lanthorn, that he could read them when he entered with it in his hand on the stage. (Nichols 57-58)

Nichols then informs readers that "Hogarth painted a scene on this occasion representing a sutling booth, with the Duck [sic] of Cumberland's head by way of sign [and that he] also prepared the play-bill with characteristic ornaments" (Nichols 58). As in the Highgate episode, this last anecdote not only sheds light on one specific feature of Hogarth's composition but it also explains the very method adopted by the artist in order to execute his picture. Hogarth first seized the essential features of a scene or a face before completing the final version elsewhere. He created, in Joseph Burke's phrase, a "mnemonic shorthand" which allowed him to record swiftly an event taking place before his eyes and then elaborate on this very first impression in order to execute and complete the definitive picture (Burke, xxxix). Hogarth's technique is underlined on different occasions. John Nichols, for instance, remarks that "[i]t was likewise Mr. *Hogarth's* custom to sketch out on the spot any remarkable face which particularly struck him, and of which he wished to preserve the remembrance" (Nichols 15). Nichols then illustrates this statement with a story:

> A gentleman still living informs me, that being once with our painter at the *Bedford Coffee- house*, he observed him to draw something with a pencil on his nail. Enquiring what had been his employment, he was shewn the countenance (a whimsical one) of a person who was then at a small distance. (Nichols 15)

Such a passage is very similar to the Highgate episode: both relate a scene in which the artist is seen recording the facial features of one or several individual(s) present around him. Whilst this brief anecdote exemplifies Nichols's statement about Hogarth's artistic method, it simul-

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[5] Dr. Hoadly was the late Chancellor of Winchester and a close friend to Hogarth.

taneously functions as the framing narrative to a longer, more detailed story, in which we learn that:

> It happened in the early part of *Hogarth's* life, that a nobleman, who was uncommonly ugly and deformed, came to sit to him for his picture. It was executed with a skill that did honour to the artist's abilities; but the likeness was rigidly observed, without even the necessary attention to compliment or flattery. The peer, disgusted at his counterpart of his dear self, never once thought of paying for a reflector that would only insult him with his deformities. (Nichols 15)

Because the nobleman refuses to accept, and hence pay for, a picture showing the defects of his own countenance, the artist expresses his readiness to use his drawing as an artistic weapon and to add "a tail and some other little appendages" to the portrait before sending it to a certain "Mr. Hare, *the famous wild-beast man*" so that it can be exhibited at his place. The artist's "intimation had its desired effect," we are told; the man finally sent the money to Hogarth and received his portrait which was, however, immediately "committed to the flames" (Nichols 15-16).

These examples have, I hope, made it clear that the anecdote plays a specific role in the texts devoted to the life and work of Hogarth. Unlike Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, where anecdotes serve mainly as entertaining elements, Hogarthian anecdotes throw light on the artist's style and method. Because of their intrinsic qualities – their moving (unfixed) pictoriality – such anecdotes are closely analogous to Hogarth's narrative pictures in which different stories are related simultaneously within the same visual space.[6] In fact, as Mitchell has argued, the very physical existence of the anecdote (or any kind of text) on the page, that is, the sequence of words which constitutes the anecdote, also represents, in the most nonmetaphoric sense, a textual space to be taken into consideration (Mitchell 282). Such an observation reinforces the already close relationship and similarities between anecdotal texts and images. It also explains why very often anecdotes were related when the prints themselves could not be provided by the artist's biographers who claimed that the sketch made by Hogarth had either been stolen, lost, or

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[6] The third plate of the *Harlot Progress* is a typical example where several scenes are depicted within the same pictorial space: Moll Hackabout, whilst having tea with her maid in the foreground of the picture, does not notice the magistrate's and his attendants' entry into the room, shown in the background, come in order to arrest her and send her to a house of correction.

had not been engraved. For instance Nichols, after relating the theatrical event in Dr. Hoadley's house, writes regretfully that "the original drawing is still preserved, and we could wish it were engraved; as the slightest sketch from the design of so grotesque a painter would be welcome to the numerous collectors of his work" (Nichols 58). Anecdotes were used literally as the verbal and spatial counterparts to the pictures. Perhaps the best instance testifying to the closeness of anecdotal text and picture – and to the possibility of replacing one with the other – is provided by the account of Hogarth's death, an event which Hogarth could obviously not have recorded but which Nichols recounts in a highly pictorial manner, thereby allowing his readers to visualize clearly the episode in their mind's eye. In a scene that can be compared to John Ireland on the death of Leonardo, Nichols tells us in a much less solemn tone that

> On the 25th of *October*, 1764, [the artist] was conveyed from thence [i.e. *Chiswick*] to *Leicester-fields*, in a very weak condition, yet remarkably chearful; and, receiving an agreeable letter from the *American* Dr. *Franklin*, drew up a rough draught on an answer to it; but going to bed, he was seized with a vomiting, upon which he rung his bell with such violence that he broke it, and expired about two hours afterwards in the arms of Mrs. *Mary Lewis* [...] Before our artist went to bed, he boasted of having eaten a pound of beefsteaks for his dinner and was to all appearance heartier than he had been for a long time before. His disorder was an aneurism and his corpse was interred at Chiswick, where an elegant mausoleum is erected to his memory. (93-94)

I would like conclude by referring briefly to another important role played by anecdotes in the biographies of Hogarth. If the examples quoted above have shown how such brief stories could help readers to visualize the painter/engraver's art, on a different level, they have also shown how closely biographers associated his life with his work. This way of reading art was no exception. At that time – and by contrast to a minority of connoisseurs who privileged a formal and stylistic, rather than a biographical, approach to art – the vast majority of English writers still continued to give an account of British art through the lens of biography and to rely heavily on artistic anecdotes. In the *Anecdotes* of Hogarth, the life-and-work relationship was underpinned by the fact that both biographical information and prints were interwoven within the same work. The physical adjacency of personal facts and printed pictures emphasized their close relation to, and dependence on, each

other. As regards the anecdotes themselves, by making Hogarth simultaneously a participant in, *and* the visual recorder of, an event he had witnessed, the biographer always implicitly made Hogarth the (invisible) protagonist of his drawings. Moreover, John Nichols's statement that "[Hogarth's] works [. . .] are his history" (Nichols 106) strongly underscores the intimacy between the artist's life and work, as does the following remark by John Bowyer Nichols in the preface to his *Anecdotes of William Hogarth* (1833):

> The works of Hogarth are, indeed, generally allowed to have a moral tendency, by painting Vice in those true and disgusting colours which, by leading the mind to reflection, will induce it to embrace with zeal the cause of Virtue. Anecdotes of his life and character, the object and the consequence of his performance, become, *therefore*, proper and indispensable subjects of animadversion and critical attention; and these have accordingly exercised the pens of several eminent individuals. (Bowyer Nichols iv, my emphasis)

Here, the author first emphasizes the didactic aspect of Hogarth's artistic method and stresses the important role of colours in the education of individuals. He then directly associates the anecdotes of Hogarth's life and character with his own artistic production; they represent "the object and the consequence of his performance."

Such a biographical reading of Hogarth's art would persist in the following decades. It would, in fact, find its most concrete realization in the second half of the nineteenth century when painters such as William Powell Frith or Edward Matthew Ward illustrated scenes in which Hogarth *himself* was represented. Rather than depicting scenes from the lives of the Old Masters – a subject very popular at the time, especially in France (Haskell) – Frith and Ward focused instead on their own national painter, the leader of the English School of Painting, and produced *Hogarth Before the Commandant at Calais* (1851) and *Hogarth's Studio in 1739* (1863), respectively (Hallett 321). If both paintings reveal the "iconic" dimension of Hogarth at the time – as well as the extent to which his work continued to be read through his life – Frith's painting is particularly significant because it plainly demonstrates the pictorial dimension of the anecdote, as discussed in this essay. Indeed. by contrast to Ward who made up a scene from the life of the English artist, Frith

depicted a very specific anecdote from Hogarth's biography.[7] His painting in fact brings the story of the anecdote full circle: whereas in the eighteenth century, biographers related an anecdote to compensate for the absence (or the loss) of a Hogarthian print, in the nineteenth century, Frith allowed himself to be inspired by one of these brief, striking incidents in order to execute his own picture.

[7] The anecdote reads as follows: "Soon after the peace of *Aix la Chapelle*, he went over to *France*, and was taken into custody at *Calais*, while he was drawing the gate of that town, a circumstance which he has recorded in his picture, intituled, "O the Roast Beef of *Old England*" published *March 26*, 1749. He was actually carried before the governor as a spy, and, after a very strict examination, committed a prisoner to *Grandsire*, his landlord, on his promising that *Hogarth* should not go out of his house till it was to embark for *England*" (Nichols 49).

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